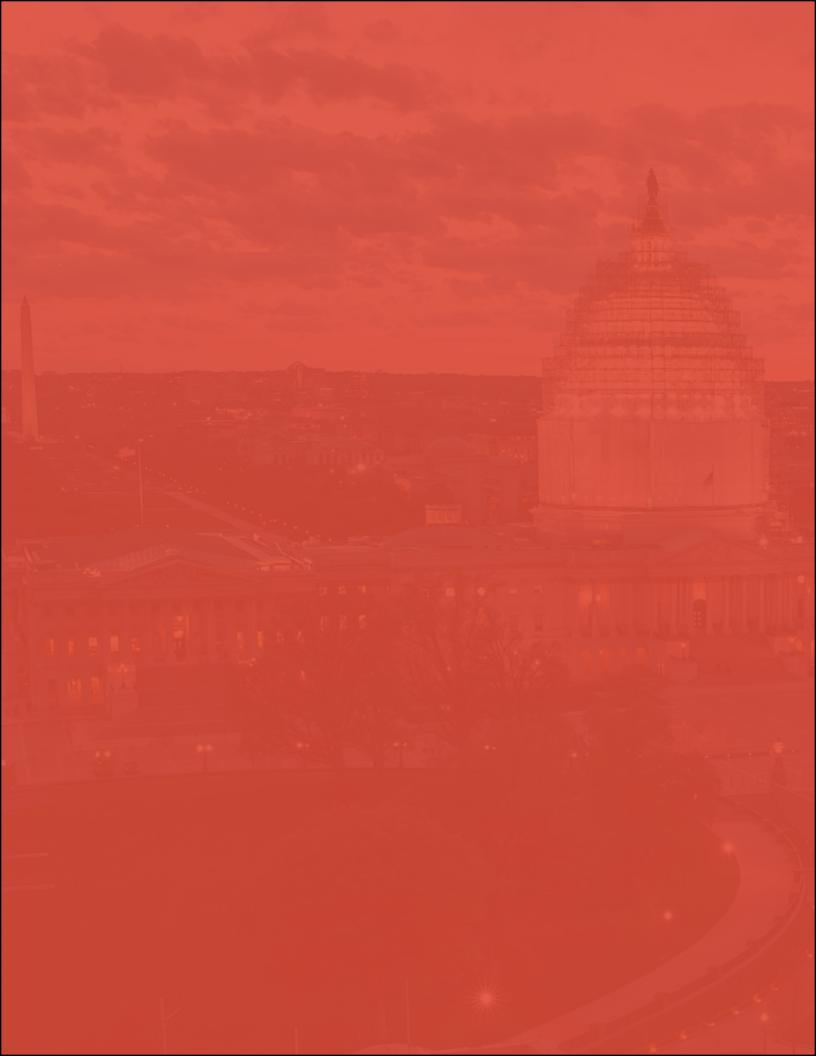
SECOND CONGRESSIONAL HACKATHON

SUMMARY REPORT
114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

"It is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the House of Representatives should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people."

- James Madison
FEDERALIST NO. 52



A MODERN CONGRESS

We are living in a period of dramatic change. Digital platforms are reshaping virtually every sector of our economy, and they present an immense opportunity for increased efficiency, transparency, and innovation. Yet our government has too often failed to keep pace with those changes and take advantage of those opportunities.

This capability gap is more than an inconvience; it is undermining the public's relationship with Congress. To be clear: not the public's opinion of one particular official or one party, but with the institution itself. Left unchanged, Congress will not have the tools to succeed in the emerging digital environment.

The good news is that Congress has seen these moments before. The rise of industrialized newspapers, radio and television all challenged our nation's legislative institutions. Ultimately, Congress changed how it did business by focusing on building an infrastructure capable of supporting legislative progress in each of those new eras.

This is the challenge before Congress today. The progress of the last several years in standardizing legislative data has laid the foundation for substantial improvements to how this institution functions at its core mission: delivering legislative results for the American public.

We aimed to create a bipartisan forum that gathered together stakeholders from Capitol Hill and interested citizens from around the country to explore how we can modernize Congress to improve the legislative process and the institution. This document outlines the ideas generated from those conversations.

As always, in #HackWeTrust.

Matt Lira Senior Advisor Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy

Steve Dwyer
Senior Policy Advisor, Digital Director
Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer



RECOMMENDED ACTION ITEMS

There are three actions items, developed from discussions at the Hackathon, that we wanted to highlight for immediate consideration. In general, the success of Congress at providing structured data should now be leveraged to provide improved experiences for the public, Members and staff.

Create Publicly-Available Congressional Data APIs

Providing legislative data via stable APIs will enable third-party developers to create more dynamic interfaces for legislative information.

Improve Ease of Discovery of Congressional Resources

Congress has to make it easier to find those resources that currently exist; a new platform should be created by the Clerk of the House, Data. House. Gov, that indexes those resources for developers and the public-at-large.

Improve Digitally-Native Constituent Experiences

The public is frustrated with their interactions with Congress. There needs to be serious efforts to modernize the core elements of the public's online interactions with this institution: revitalized CRM platforms, new correspondence procedures, expanded staff training, and streamlined online casework requests.



There are three things I want government to do - I want it to be effective, I want it to be efficient, and I want it to be accountable. All of those are achievable through technology.

We are living through an era of dramatic change, with technology driving significant changes to almost every sector of our economy. Unfortunately, the government's use of those technologies often seems a generation behind.

This is what motivates our conversation today; while we may not always agree on every policy proposal, we must work together to modernize our government for the digital age.

We need to encourage more Representatives to use technology themselves, instead of just delegating it to somebody else. Why? Because that's how the American public are living their lives and your elected officials need to be a part of that world.

Structure dictates behavior, particularly in our country's increasingly diversified media environment. Regardless of what one believes, there is likely a source of information that validates that worldview. This confirmation bias is driving our country apart, by rewarding extremes instead of rewarding solutions.

Congressional use of technology must be more than the pursuit of vanity metrics; we must leverage technology to engage the public towards policy development and problem solving.

Digital platforms provide us with an opportunity to talk with the people, not just parrot talking points. We need to think about how these platforms can serve our institution's core legislative purpose. Think of committee hearings; television didn't just change the press conferences, they changed the hearings themselves. That's how we need to think, as we move Congress into the digital age.

That's what today's Hackathon is about, bringing a diverse group of people together, even those who don't always agree, to think about how to improve this institution.

Thank you for participating in this important discussion. Working together, we can build a modern Congress that delivers results.



I'm pleased that today we have this opportunity; that Members, staff, advocates, technologists, and both sides of the aisle are joining together for a very positive, bipartisan constructive event.

As a result of the first Hackathon, the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act of 2013 created the bi-partisan bulk data task force. Led by Deputy Clerk of the House Bob Reeves, the task force has been hard at work to move this institution forward. Bob has done a tremendous job leading these efforts to support legislative branch activity.

The task force has created a sense of urgency and momentum, in modernizing and opening our legislative branch data systems. It has revamped websites, opened and improved data sets, and expanded congressional online video. Under Bob's leadership, Congress has largely accomplished the major recommendations of the original Hackathon.

I expect today's conversation will produce thoughts, suggestions, ideas that we will then implement and make the Congress even more transparent and accessible to the public. I also want to acknowledge the significant progress the Obama Administration has made in modernizing government technology, by tapping into the talent and business practices of Silicon Valley to improve the way the federal workforce serves the American people. But there is so much more that needs to be done. Both in the Executive Branch and here in the Legislative Branch. By it's very nature, modernizing government technology is an ongoing project.

Modernizing government technology is absolutely critical if our democracy is going to remain as open and transparent as we want it.

Making government more efficient, effective, transparent, and responsive, starts of course with making sure those who serve in government are better connected digitally to those who serve.

I must say how pleased I am to be with all of you today - what you are doing today concerns not only how we could make technology work better, but how we could make our democracy work better. And if we do that, we will have a better country.

LEGISLATIVE WORKFLOW AND LEGISLATIVE DATA

GROUP CURATORS: YURI BECKELMAN AND SEAMUS KRAFT

The Legislative Data group explored all facets of the Congressional legislative workflow, ranging from the writing and editing of bills to committee hearings to the bulk data encompassing bill text, amendments, and votes. By examining the bill production process and the data that is available or could potentially be made available, participants focused their discussions on ways to produce better legislation under increasingly transparent conditions.

Make Congressional Data APIs Publicly-Available

While great strides have been made in standardizing legislative data and making that information publicly-available, much of this information has yet to be offered as APIs from official sources. This would provide developers, both internal and external to Congress, with the certainty necessary to develop more advanced applications and platforms.

Integrate Congressional Video Archives With Congress.gov

Over the past several years, Congress has substantially increased the availability of video content online. This applies to both live and archival footage, most of which is not available in centralized repositories. For each piece of legislation, the Library of Congress should link to the related video content on Congress.gov - increasing the ease of finding material from HouseLive and other video sources.

Standardized-Data for Different Points Over Time

We should develop ways to track legislative data points over time. For example, which Members served on a given committee on a specific day. This will enable a more accurate historical record.

Create Data. House.gov

The House of Representatives has made substantial progress on providing machine-readable legislative data, yet there is no central repository to find the latest sources for all this information. The Clerk of the House should create a new landing page, Data. House. Gov, which links to all the sources of standardized data within the House of Representatives.

Policy Summary Statements For Congress.gov

The Library of Congress should include two 300-word summaries with each piece of legislation on Congress.gov, modeled on the debate participation that occurs on the House Floor. Using the same method that determines which Representative claims the supporting and opposing debate time, these two summaries should be provided by two Member offices.

Analyzing Data to Foster Greater Congressional Collaboration

As the amount of real-time and historical Congressional standardized data continues to increase, it would be useful to explore how to foster effective collaboration within the policy-making process.





MODERNIZING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

GROUP CURATORS: CARRIE ADAMS AND STEVEN E. JOHNSTON

Congressional committees are at the very core of the legislative process, as such there is a significant opportunity to modernize committee hearings for the digital age. There needs to be a greater focus on creating the infrastructure necessary for committees to succeed in today's world; this requires more than ad hoc instances of innovation. We must shift greater focus towards updating the core operations and capabilities of Congressional committees.

Real-Time Hearing Transcripts

Unfortunately, too much committee-level information is currently provided on an ad hoc basis or not provided at all. Hearing transcripts are a natural place to begin, ideally produced in real-time and in machine-readable formats. This data would provide a strong foundation for search engines and developers to enable greater internal and public use of this information.

Integrate Digital Platforms in Hearings

Digital platforms should be used to do more than simply communicate what a committee is doing, but should become an integral part of the committee's legislative activity. Just as radio and television were fully integrated into hearings themselves, not just follow-on press events, so too should digital platforms be fully integrated into committee hearings and markups.



Create Hearings. House. Gov

To enable greater ease of discovery, the current docs. House.gov committee repository should be made available via a redirect from Hearings. House.gov - a more user-friendly and understandable URL for public communications.

Analyze Testimony Data

Using standardized data, there could be profile pages on who has testified before which committees, with direct links to archival records of their previous testimony.

Create "Hearing Genius" To Enable Public Commentary

Inspired by "Rap-Genius," there could be an easy-to-use platform that enables Members and the public to comment, annotate, fact check and provide additional context for hearing transcripts.

Enable Remote Testimony

Given advances in video-conferencing technology, committees should allow for testimony to be conducted remotely. This would enable a more diverse array of witnesses to appear before committees.

Crowdsource Policy Development

There will always be more expertise outside of any institution than within it, particularly as one considers national policies. This is the great cognitive surplus that can be leveraged in policy development via digital platforms.

Crowdsource Oversight

Based on successful projects in the academic community, committees should provide focused opportunities for the public to help review appropriate mass documents and information to flag specific items for further review by committee professional staff.



CASEWORK AND CONSTITUENT SERVICES

GROUP CURATORS: TESS GLANCEY AND ERIC STECKLOW

One of the core responsibilities of a Congressional office is constituent casework. Unlike legislative correspondence, which concerns a constituent's views on a specific policy or issue, casework is facilitating processes within the federal government on behalf of a constituent. This ranges from flag requests to liaising with federal agencies who constituents feel are not serving them well.

Privacy and Confidentiality Issues

Casework often involves extremely personal information; ensuring that a constituent's personal information remains secure throughout the entire casework process was identified as a vital priority.

Casework.gov

A centralized website that provides a digitallynative experience for submitting casework requests. After submitting their address, the form could be branded specifically for their Representative within an optimized template. This will ensure that casework information is easy-to-understand, secure and professional for the entire House community.



Casework Tracking Portal

Each casework request would be assigned a tracking number, similar to how shipping companies process packages, so that constituents will be able to track the progress that is made on their specific request. Aggregated data could be made publicly available to show the overall casework workload processed by Congress on an ongoing basis.

Ask.House.Gov

A webpage to provide answers to constituents' frequently asked questions on various Congressional services. The best answers are voted up by the public, in a Quora-like model, to provide a continually improving clearinghouse of information on how to best utilize the entire array of services offered to the public.

Facebook Casework App

A Facebook application which provides secure casework forms for Member's profile pages. This would help ensure that a constituent seeking help with a federal agency would be able to connect with the appropriate process, while also taking steps to protect their privacy. A constituent should be able to complete the entire casework submissions process within the platform where they began the process.

Data Standards for Casework Process

By providing a consistent data standard for all casework requests, it will become easier for vendors and other developers to continually create new online experiences for those who submit requests and those who manage them internally. A data standard will also ensure that a Member office's casework information will be compatible during long-term technological changes.



ENGAGING WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

GROUP CURATORS: MATT DEFREITAS AND MINDY FINN

The public is not satisfied with the existing methods of communicating with the United States Congress. At the same time, Members and staff are equally unsatisfied with the infrastructure and processes for managing constituent correspondence. This is an area that demands the attention of those looking to build a more functional institution and new technologies provide significant opportunity for progress.

Open Source CRM

The House should foster an Open Source CRM codebase to bring constituent correspondence into the modern world. Much like existing open source platforms throughout the web, this would enable the House and its vendors to continually stay upto-date. This is not a cure all, but it will enable more effective constituent relationships with Member offices.

Legislative "Life Cycle" Tracking Platform

There should be a platform that not only tracks the progress of legislation in Congress, but also the outcomes of that legislation if adopted. For example, if a bill appropriates money towards a specific problem, this new platform would show which specific agencies and projects received the funding, how it was used and what the outcomes of that expenditure actually were.



Local Impact of Legislation

There should be a platform that takes legislative proposals and provides impact analysis at the local level. For instance, if legislation impacts national parks, this platform could provide citizens with the actual impact that proposal would have on their community.

Social Media Engagement

Millions of Americans contact their elected officials on social media every year, yet far too many of these messages are ignored. As an institution, we spend considerable resources trying to get the message out, without considering how to handle those who are trying to get their message in. We need to end the ad hoc nature of Congressional social engagement, and leverage the tools that will enable more genuine and consistent engagement with the public on social media.

Weigh In On Issues

A new public channel that would introduce issues to the public. Any citizen would be able to upload a one-minute video commentary on a specific issue, engaging in a substantive public debate on any issue. Users can then vote videos up-or-down, so that casual users can see the best videos that have been curated.

Public Petitions for Congressional Offices

A new platform should be created that enables every Representative to respond to petitions from verified constituents, based on thresholds determined by each Representative. This platform enables more dynamic communication than is possible with traditional correspondence, at current resource allocation levels.



MOONSHOT GROUP

GROUP CURATORS: ANTON VULJAJ AND DANIEL SCHUMAN

Moonshots are those ideas that don't focus on incremental gains, but those that have the potential to deliver exponential progress over the status quo. As an institution, Congress is facing huge challenges and we should challenge ourselves to think about breakthrough solutions that can deliver a more satisfactory legislative experience to the American public.

Using Congressional Data To Build Trust

As the result of many years of transparency progress, there is a great deal of Congressional data publicly available. It would be interesting to see the results of an academic review of this information, which explores data-driven trends in effective legislative relationships.

Verified Constituents on Digital Platforms

One of the challenges for elected officials is prioritizing constituent communication on digital platforms. While each platform varies their approach, it would be extremely useful to know which interactions are from verified constituents. This would improve the ability of Members to deliver meaningful experiences to those constituents on digital platforms.



Revitalize the Roles and Organization Within Congressional Offices

Organizational logistics have changed significantly over the past several decades, yet the organization of a Congressional Member office remains essentially unchanged. We should explore ways to reinvent the Congressional office, so that it can better serve today's communities.

The ability for staff to communicate over long distance has substantially improved, providing new options and possible roles for district staff. At the same time, changes in public correspondence create the possibility for a more pro-active approach to content creation and experiences.

Even within the existing structures, the daily and weekly routines of Member offices could also be modernized to deliver a more satisfactory experience to constituents. This is an area that should be continually explored to keep Congress effective.

Enable the Public to Follow Specific Legislation

Most methods of receiving information from Congress are centered around specific elected officials; this is appropriate and should continue. However, it would be useful for the public if they could follow specific legislation; receiving point-of-fact updates related exclusively to legislation they've chosen to follow. This would enable greater public awareness of legislative actions, particularly those which pass via suspension of the Rules.

Changing the Culture

The public feels that Congress doesn't listen to them. Not one elected official or political party, but increasingly that the institution itself fails to adequately listen to their concerns. The Congressional community needs to challenge itself to explore how to build a better relationship with the public and how to change the culture on Capitol Hill to meet the public's expectations.



